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TAGS: [PREL](#) [HR](#) [ICTY](#) [EUN](#) [USEU](#) [BRUSSELS](#)

SUBJECT: EU "TASK FORCE" ON CROATIA TO MEET WITH ICTY AND CROATIANS ON APRIL 25

REF: USEU TODAY 3/24/2005

Classified By: Rick Holtzapple, PolOff, Reasons 1.4 (B/D)

SUMMARY

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1. (C) Commission, UK and Luxembourg Presidency officials in Brussels expect, and hope, that "nothing new" will come out of the first meeting of the EU "task force" on Croatia on April 26 in Luxembourg. The UK has dropped the idea of presenting the Croats with a written to-do list, but will still endeavor to be very specific during the task force meetings about steps the GoC has failed to take, and that it must take. Our UK contact said this was intended as much "to educate Luxembourg and Austria" as it was to inform the Croats. But UK PolDir Sawers plans to reinforce the message with the GoC during a visit to Zagreb the first week of May. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) EU leaders at their Summit on March 23, 2005, agreed to create a task force composed of the Luxembourg Presidency, the incoming British and Austrian Presidencies, the Commission and Javier Solana to report on Croatia's progress in meeting the conditions for opening accession negotiations with the EU. This task force was proposed by Austria (Croatia's biggest booster within the EU) just days after the EU had postponed opening negotiations on March 17 due to failure by Croatia to satisfy the EU that it was "fully cooperating" with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). But no written or formal mandate was given to the group other than to consult with both ICTY and the GoC and then report to the General Affairs Council composed of EU FMs. The decision to create a task force was announced by Luxembourg PM Juncker and in a subsequent press release, nothing more.

3. (C) The Presidency has announced the task force will have its first meeting April 26, on the margins of an already-planned EU-Croatia Association Council. The task force will meet separately, first with ICTY prosecutor Carla Del Ponte, and then with Croatian PM Ivo Sanader. But participants in the task force say they know little more than that. A Commission official involved told us, "The entire set-up is a bit awkward. We don't expect, or want, much of anything to come out of this." Both the Commission and the UK will be lobbying to keep any results from this session as low-key as possible, pushing for a report by cable (COREU) to member states afterward, rather than including it on the agenda of the May 23 or June 13 GAERCs. They expect the Austrians will push for a GAERC discussion in May. Political Directors of the five EU participants will meet on April 25 to try and agree on the task force's procedures and objectives.

4. (C) Commission, UK and Luxembourg Presidency contacts have all stressed with us that this task force has no mandate from the broader EU to negotiate with Croatia or even to deliver any message beyond the one previously issued by the European Council -- accession negotiations can only begin when Croatia is fully cooperating with the ICTY. Commission and UK contacts report that back channel contacts with the ICTY prosecutor's office indicate she will have no progress to report by the Croats since her last presentation to the EU in March.

5. (C) The UK, while no fan of the whole task force idea, has been examining ways it might be able to use it to prod Zagreb in to doing the necessary and finding Gotovina. The UK floated with other task force members the idea of giving the Croats an illustrative, but not necessarily comprehensive, list of additional steps Zagreb should take to cooperate with the ICTY. The Luxembourg Presidency and Enlargement Commissioner Rehn both rejected this, saying the task force had no EU approval for such a list, and fearing it would encourage the Croats to focus on just those tasks rather than on delivering Gotovina. Our UK contact said, Austria and Solana's staff did support the idea, "but for the wrong reasons."

6. (C) The UK nonetheless plans to be quite specific in its oral presentation at the task force session with Sanader. The purpose, our contact said, was as much "to educate Luxembourg and Austria" on the many ways in which Croatia could be doing more, as it was to convince the GoC to step up

its efforts. UK PolDir John Sawers would then be traveling to Zagreb the following week to go over these issues in greater detail with the GoC. Our Brussels contact did not have specific details about what would be on the UK list.

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